Rhodora

JOURNAL OF

THE NEW ENGLAND BOTANICAL CLUB

Vol. 46. June, 1944. No. 546.

A PLEA FOR THE ELIMINATION OF UNNECESSARY NOMENCLATURAL CHANGES

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All taxonomists resent the time lost from research work in dealing with necessary nomenclatural questions, but few who are not actually engaged in bibliographical work realize the extent of the problem. In the Gray Herbarium Card Index a card is inserted for each new name of flowering plant or vascular cryptogam growing wild in America. In case of a transfer two cards have to be published. This index includes literature from 1886 to date. During this time an estimated 232,000 cards have been published for these two groups of plants alone. No taxonomist can hope to keep in mind such a large number of names.

A good percentage of these new names and transfers really clarify the situation and make the future work of taxonomists easier, but during the last twelve years of indexing we have found numerous examples of unnecessary multiplication of names. Most of them fall readily into the following groups:

1) Nomina nuda used without being published according to the rules.

2) Herbarium names cited in synonymy.

3) Trinomials for which the category has to be designated by later authors.

4) Substitute names, superfluous when published.

5) Homonyms—names which have already been used for other plants and for which other names have to be substituted. In most cases the publication of these names could be avoided if the names were checked in the Index Kewensis, its Supplements and the Gray Herbarium Card Index before publication.

Many taxonomists carry their names through the original Index Kewensis and the Gray Herbarium Card Index, but neglect the Index Kewensis Supplements which are necessary for genera represented in the old world or with cultivated species, as neither are included in the Gray Herbarium cards.

6) New combinations made without citation of basonym or with imperfect citation so that at best a bibliographer has to guess at the basis of the combination and at worst the combination has to be made over again by a later author.

7) New combinations occasioned by change of rank and not properly indicated by their authors. The number of new combinations has been greatly increased of late by diverse interpretations of the terms subspecies, varietas and forma. The Gray Herbarium cards show many epithets used first in a trinomial and then transferred to each of the above categories. Some taxonomists change the category without changing the author-citation or designating a transfer. It is almost impossible for a bibliographer to recognize these new combinations (or status novi) and they are often omitted from indices and consequently remade by later workers on the group.

The International Rules of Botanical Nomenclature definitely bar out or at least discourage the use of all but the last of these groups of names. Indexing current literature is very much simpler than it was twenty-five years ago when there was less conformity to a set pattern, but recently there have been more and more cases of new epithets given to plants when the category is changed. This confusion has arisen partly because of two different interpretations of the meaning of "Recommendation". The distinction is made in article 2 that rules are retroactive, but that recommendations are for the future; ". . . names or forms contrary to a recommendation cannot on that account be rejected, but they are not examples to be followed." Some taxonomists believe that for current and future work the recommendations are no less binding than the rules, others believe that they are merely suggestions to be followed or not as they appeal to the individual taxonomist. Had Recommendation XXXVI (3), "When a subdivision of a species becomes a species, or the inverse change occurs, the original epithet should be retained unless the resulting combination is rejected under Section 12", been a rule instead of a recommendation there could have been no possible question as to its meaning. As it is, many excellent taxonomists are taking advantage of Article 58, ". . . when

a group changes its rank, the earliest legitimate name or epithet given to the group in its new rank is valid, unless that name or the resulting association or combination is a later homonym (see Art. 60, 61)", to change the epithet. It may be argued that under a strict application of the rules (see Art. 60 (1, 2)) these epithets substituted when the category is changed should be thrown out as substitute names, superfluous when published. At any rate they are definitely contrary to Recommendation XXXVI (3) and they make the work of future bibliographers more difficult without, so far as we can see, serving any useful purpose. They multiply the number of unnecessary names when most of us can remember but a small portion of the necessary ones.

As a corollary to this, a recent author makes a new combination in *Distichlis* as follows "D. SPICATA var. **stricta** (Gray) . . . , comb. nov. *Brizopyrum spicatum* var. *strictum* A. Gray; . . . (Based on *Uniola stricta* Torr.)." This citing as a basonym the earliest use of the epithet under the accepted category instead of the earliest use of the name under any category is against established usage and if persisted in could cause a great deal of unnecessary checking and confusion. It is apparently contrary to Art. 49 which requires the *original* author to be cited. But even if permissible, if it were adopted in an index such as the Gray Herbarium Card Index it would mean that the card carrying the original use of the epithet for a given plant would no longer give all the nomenclatural synonyms since 1886, but only those synonyms in which the author uses the same category; and that our subscribers would have to check a different series of cards for each category to which a given group might be assigned. Later, when future workers tried to unravel the tangle and check back in the literature to find the correct author-citation after these two systems had been used simultaneously for a period of years there would unquestionably be much gnashing of teeth if not wailing.

In most branches of science, papers which prove to be of little value can be ignored by later workers. From the very nature of the subject this cannot be true of taxonomy; an error, or even an eccentricity, in nomenclature once made is likely to irritate and confuse future workers for many generations. It is

therefore especially important that taxonomists make easier the work of their successors by being meticulously considerate even in small matters.

GRAY HERBARIUM.

NOTES ON NORTHERN MAINE PLANTS

LEROY F. NORTON

IN exploring remote areas in the general region of the headwaters of the Aroostook River and its tributaries several plants which are infrequent or rare in Maine have been collected.

The collecting trips represent long excursions over difficult terrain far beyond improved highways. The plants were either identified or verified by Glen Chamberlain of Presque Isle, Maine, and later checked at the Herbarium of the University of Maine by Dr. F. H. Steinmetz. For the distribution data I am indebted to the department of Botany and Entomology at the University of Maine and Glen Chamberlain who is at present making a critical study of the flora of the Aroostook River valley.

Draba arabisans Michx. T. 7, R. 9, Piscataquis County and T. 11, R. 8, Aroostook County.

Heretofore known only from Mt. Kineo in Piscataquis County and Day Mountain in Franklin County.

Draba lanceolata Royle. T. 6, R. 9, Piscataquis County.

The collection is significant in that it heretofore has not been known from Maine and interestingly bridges over a gap in range of the species in temperate northeast America as shown by Prof. M. L. Fernald.[1]

Asplenium Trichomanes L. T. 6, R. 8, Penobscot County and in T. 11, R. 8, Aroostook County.

This infrequent plant was found growing in profusion in restricted habitats. The species has not been known to occur north of Hancock and Oxford Counties.

Dryopteris fragrans (L.) Schott var. *remotiuscula* Komarov. T. 8, R. 9 and T. 8, R. 10, Piscataquis County, T. 11, R. 8, Aroostook County, and in T. 6, R. 8, Penobscot County.

In each locality the plant grew in profusion. A recent study

[1] RHODORA 36: 358. 1934.